

# People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 8th August, 2023

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murray (Chairperson);  
Councillors Bell, Black, R. Brooks, Bunting,  
Canavan, Cobain, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly,  
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Kelly, Magee, Maghie,  
G. McAteer, McCusker, Ó Néill and Verner.

Also in attendance: Councillors T. Brooks and McMullan.

In attendance: Ms. N. Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager;  
Ms. C. Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager;  
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;  
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building  
Control; and  
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

An apology was received from Councillor Bower who had just had a baby girl and Members extended their best wishes to her.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 13th and 26th June, 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct.

It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd July.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Black, Canavan, M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Ó Néill and Verner declared an interest in agenda item 3b – Department for Communities Letter of Officer Community Support Programme in that they were associated with or worked for an organisation which was in receipt of funding and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillors Canavan and Verner declared an interest in agenda item 2a Social Supermarket Update in that they were associated with or worked for an organisation which was in receipt of funding and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Doherty declared an interest in agenda item 7d Period Products Scheme as he had previously collaborated with the Council regarding this scheme.

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

**Presentation**

**Social Supermarket Fund**

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. J. Kinnear and Ms. C. McKeown representing the Ashton Community Trust and Ms. C. Henderson representing In this Together who both operated Social Supermarkets within their local areas.

The representatives commenced by providing an overview of their respective social supermarkets and how they operated within their communities.

The Committee was advised of the strength of need in the communities as result of the cost-of-living crisis, resulting in more working two parent families presenting for support on a regular basis amongst many other people who were struggling to make ends meet.

The representatives highlighted that many people were self-referring because they were no longer able to be referred to a food bank after reaching their limit. They explained that to be eligible to join the shop customers had to be on lower incomes and to live locally, with the food sold at around 30% of the normal retail price.

The representatives also provided an overview of other work they undertook within their communities, including trying to address social isolation and loneliness and highlighted the excellent work undertaken by their many volunteers whom the organisations would not exist without.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives for their valuable commitment and work within their respective local communities following which they left the meeting.

Noted.

**Restricted**

**The information contained in the reports associated with the following three items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the Members of the Press and public from the Committee meeting during discussion on the following 4 items as, due to their nature, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

**Social Supermarket Fund – Update**

(Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer Community Provision, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the activity delivered through the Social Supermarket Fund in 2022/23 and background on the different social supermarket models. It also advised the Members of the allocation from the Department for

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

Communities (DfC) through the Social Supermarket Fund for the 2023/24 financial year and sought consideration as to whether they approved the recommended approach for the allocation of the 2023/24 funds to support the activity from 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024.

The Committee was advised that the recommended approach had considered learning from previous schemes and had also been informed by the ongoing work in relation to use of the Hardship/Cost of Living funding that had been made available by DfC for 2023/24. The approach had also been informed by the fact that until the 7th July 2023 there had been no confirmation of the level of DfC funding for this area of work, in fact there had been no financial support for activity since 31st March 2023. This timescale also meant that there would be insufficient time or resources available to manage an open call grants programme in order to support activity quickly, as the administration of open call would have required significant lead in and delivery time and would not have enabled delivery of activity before December 2023. In addition, given the specialised nature of this work, it was noted that it was likely that only a small pool of organisations would be eligible to apply.

The officers outlined to the Members the recommendations for the allocation of the funds, as follows:

- a portion of funding to be allocated to support the establishment of new social supermarket provision, it was recommended that 10% of the overall budget be set aside for this. If these funds had not been used by 1st December 2023, they would be allocated to existing partners on a pro rata basis. Officers would promote this opportunity and seek to work with new organisations. The Director of Neighbourhood Services be granted delegated authority to support new partners and allocate unspent funds to avoid delays in issuing funding;
- based on a review of the demand from organisations and the membership/areas that they serve it was suggested that the area/thematic allocation be changed to 80/20 of the remaining 90% of the budget. The allocation levels suggested would be the maximum amount that each organisation could access. All projects identified in this report would be invited to submit project proposals and these would be assessed through an agreed process to ensure that activity met the aims of the funding programme, was eligible, value for money and could be delivered within timescales. Recommendations would be brought to the Director of Neighbourhood Services in relation to the outcome of the application process and awards would be offered following his approval;
- given the successful delivery in 2022/23, it was recommended that current partners be invited to submit proposals for activity. The recommended area allocations had been identified by using the agreed population/deprivation matrix from north, south, east and west Belfast. There was recognition that these figures were from the 2011 census but new figures were not yet available. Given the increased allocation this year, it was noted that the Members might wish to consider identifying additional delivery partners in those parts of the city where there were fewer area delivery partners;

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- Support for thematic organisations that worked with specific groups of people who might have additional barriers in accessing support was also recommended. Allocations would be based on the numbers of people that accessed services from these different organisations. Some organisations served a much larger membership than others and this would be reflected in the recommended allocation;
- Of the three organisations that had received an allocation in 2022/23 but did not accept an offer, it was recommended that the Men's Advisory Project NI and Transgender NI would not be invited to apply in 2023/24, since their normal service delivery fell outside the scope of this work and their user groups would be able to access support from other funded organisations. North Belfast Advice Partnership was one of the 5 advice consortia which delivered advice services across the city and it was composed of six organisations which delivered advice services in north Belfast. It was therefore recommended that they be invited to take part in the scheme to ensure an opportunity to deliver services for that part of north Belfast.

A Member stated that he had concerns that an open call funding process for the distribution of the funding was not the approach being proposed, several Members concurred that it would be their preferred approach.

The Lead Officer advised that, given that notification of the funding had only been advised on 7th July and the approach would not be ratified by the Council until the beginning of September, there would not be adequate time due to lead in and delivery times to allow for delivery prior to Christmas. In addition, any open call procedure would be administered by the Council's Central Grants Unit and she was unsure whether it would have the capacity to administer it at this late stage, therefore, there was no guarantee it could be delivered using this model.

Following discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Murray,  
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

That the Committee agrees to deliver the allocation of funding for the Social Supermarket Fund through an open call process.

On a vote, 6 Members voted for the proposal and 11 against and it was declared lost.

**Further Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Flynn,  
Seconded by Councillor M. Doherty,

That the Committee agrees to increase a portion of funding to be allocated to support the establishment of new social supermarket provision from 10% to 25% (i.e. 25% of the overall budget be set aside for this).

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

On a vote, 7 Members voted for the proposal and 10 against and it was declared lost.

The Committee therefore:

- noted the update in respect of the activity delivered through the Social Supermarket Fund in 2022/23 and the background on different social supermarket models;
- noted the allocation from the Department for Communities (DfC) through the Social Supermarket Fund for the 2023/24 financial year;
- approved the recommended approach, information provided in paragraph 3.12 – 3.16 of the report, for allocation of the 2023/24 funds to support activity from 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024; and
- granted delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to approve the awards, to enhance awards to existing partners or make allocations to relevant organisations if required to ensure in year spend.

**Year-End Finance Report 2022-23**

The Committee was updated in respect of the financial position of the People and Communities Committee for Quarter 4, which confirmed an overspend of £760k (0.9%) of the 88.3m budget.

The main reasons for this were absorbing the pay rise, £1m of Hardship Fund payments, additional contract costs and transport cost increases. Some of these increases had been offset by additional grant income made available in year, vacancies and posts under review and delays in projects and programmes.

The Committee was advised that a report outlining the year end position for the Council had been submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 26th June, together with the Quarter 4 finance report and year-end treasury position.

The Committee noted the year-end financial position.

**Department for Communities Letter of Offer  
Community Support Programme 2023/24**

(Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer Community Provision, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that the Department for Communities (DfC) provided an annual grant to the Council to help deliver the Council's Community Support Programme (CSP).

At its meeting in April, the Committee was advised that on 27th March 2023 the Chief Executive had received correspondence from the Permanent Secretary, DfC, relating to the CSP which stated that the Department could only provide support to cover the three-month

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

period up to 30th June 2023 with the allocations based on the 2022/23 budget settlement. The correspondence added; *“I hope you will understand why this allocation cannot be interpreted as an assurance as to the level of funding available for the remainder of 2023/24, given the absence of clarity on the overall budget settlement for the Department.”*

The Neighbourhood Services Manager reported that on 7th June 2023 the Council had received further correspondence advising that the department had decided to extend the interim funding arrangements, based on the 2022/23 opening budget allocations, and that these would run from 1st July to 30th September 2023.

Following further budgetary consideration by DfC, the Council received the Letter of Offer for 2023/24 on 7th July 2023. The funding allocation was based on the 2022/23 figures which combined nine separate elements, as follows:

Community Support General	£829,405.44
Advice Grant	£607,928.42
Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation - Appeals	£70,400.00
Consolidated Uplift for CS General, Advice and Appeals (21/22 – carried forward)	£34,316.02
Consolidated Uplift for CSP General, Advice & Appeals (22/23 - also carried forward)	£35,482.57
Consolidated Uplift for CSP General, Advice & Appeals (23/24)	£0.00
Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to Face Advice (including uplift)	£234,779.21
Social Supermarket Funding	£418,744.04
<b>CSP Grand Total</b>	<b>£2,231,055.70</b>

The Members were reminded that at previous meetings they had considered proposals to provide funding via the CSP to organisations based on the DfC budget limitations at the time and to mitigate the impact of those decisions on the community groups funded by the Council.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager explained that this Letter of Offer provided the full match funding to deliver on all the CSP funding allocation and, if they were content, officers would administer funding agreements and payments for 2023/24 in line with normal arrangements, where Letters of Offer/Funding Agreements would be issued based on the total allocations/awards outlined in Appendix 1 attached to the report, which listed the full amount that funded organisations would receive in 2023/24, of which part of this allocation was from the CSP. Following receipt of signed Letters of Offer/Funding agreements, payments would be issued on a 50/50 basis.

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- Small Grant Programme 2024/25

The Members were reminded of a previous decision to operate a revised project/activity grant approach during 2020/21 and 2021/22 as a result of the COVID-19 operating environment. In 2022/23 the Council had reverted to its historic programme of small grants provision.

The Members were asked to note that community provision small grants were administered through the Central Grants Unit and applications for projects to be delivered in 2024/25 would open in Autumn 2023, with the following grants open for applications:

- ❖ Good Relations
- ❖ Summer Scheme
- ❖ Parks Events
- ❖ Support for Sport Large Development Grant
- ❖ Support for Sport Small Development Grant
- ❖ Support for Sport Hospitality Grant
- ❖ Support for Sport Sporting Individual Grant

The Committee was advised that information about these funding opportunities would be circulated widely and staff would be available to support applicants, further details of contacts and guidance would be published at [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/grants](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/grants) to support the open call.

- Micro/Medium Grants 2024/25

The officer reminded the Members that this had previously been considered at the June meeting of Committee where it had been advised that, *'it is unlikely we will be able to invite calls for a Micro/Medium Grants scheme in 2024/25 given the current budget pressures and return to normal levels of activity within the other regular grant scheme approaches'*.

The officer advised that approval was therefore being sought that micro/medium grant programmes would not operate in 2024/25 and would not be advertised, with any available budget being redirected to support other relevant activities.

Following consideration of the funding allocation of £2,231,055.70 for the 2023/24 financial year, the Committee:

- granted approval for the Chief Executive to accept the offer on behalf of Council and for him to also accept any additional in-year allocations from the DfC relating to the Community Support Programme;
- granted approval for officers to progress funding payments where appropriate following completion of due diligence requirements;
- agreed that the micro/medium grant programmes would not be advertised in October 2023 for 2024/25 activity; and

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- noted the arrangements for the Community Provision small grant programme for 2024/25.

**2023 Air Quality Progress Report**

The Director of City Services advised that, as a component of the Council's ongoing statutory duties in respect of Local Air Quality Management (LAQM), as established via Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2022, the Council was required to provide annual Updating and Screening Assessments or Progress Reports to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) for technical appraisal and subsequent publication via the DAERA NI Air website. The Members were advised that previous Council air quality reports were accessible via the following weblink:  
<https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/laqm/district-council-reports#511>

The timetable for such reporting was established in *Table 1.2 Phased Approach - Cycle of Reporting for Northern Ireland* of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance (TG22). As part of the 8th round of local air quality management reporting, the Council's 2023 Air Quality Progress Report was due to be submitted to DAERA for technical appraisal by 30th June 2023. The Members were advised that the Council had obtained an extension to the submission date from DAERA to enable the 2023 Progress Report to be considered at Committee prior to its submission to the Technical Appraisers. This approach reflected a decision taken at the People and Communities meeting of 9th November 2021 to review air quality reports prior to their submission to DAERA.

The Members were advised that an Air Quality Progress Report was considered to be in draft format until it had been assessed and accepted by DAERA's independent Technical Appraisers, therefore, the report had been 'restricted' on the agenda.

The Members considered the report, which provided an overview of the 2023 Belfast City Council Air Quality Progress Report and of the key findings, as available at Appendix 1.

A Member stated that he would like to see the Air Quality Management Areas along the Ormeau Road and the Newtownards Road maintained at present and would like this reflected in the report.

The Director of City Services agreed to liaise with DEARA to discuss this matter further.

A further Member referred to the fact that the Council was not the lead authority in respect of some of the areas of concern within the air Quality Action Plan for the city and, given the current funding pressures, it was possible that some actions might not be able to be progressed.

The Committee:

- agreed the 2023 Belfast City Council Air Quality Progress Report, subject to rewording of the suggestion within the report that the Air Quality Management Areas along the Ormeau Road and the Newtownards Road might potentially be revoked;



**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- agreed that the report be submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) independent Technical Appraisers immediately after the Committee meeting, noting that the submission was subject to Council ratification and call-in procedures;
- agreed to highlight in the correspondence to DAERA that the Council was not the lead authority in respect of some of the areas of concern within the air Quality Action Plan for the city and that actions falling to other Government departments, for example, DfI might not be realised, given the funding pressures and changes in budget; and
- agreed that the Environmental Protection Manager would liaise directly with Councillor Black regarding the feasibility of the Forth Meadow Greenway being considered for additional assessment around air quality and noise. Agreed that the manager would also engage with DAERA regarding the status of the four existing AQMAs referenced in the report.

**Matters referred back from the Council/Motions**

**Notice of Motion - Playful Belfast City Streets**

The Committee was advised that, at the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 27th June, a motion on Playful Belfast Streets, which had been proposed by Councillor McMullan and seconded by Councillor McAteer, had been referred to the Committee for consideration.

With the permission of the Chairperson, the proposer of the motion, Councillor McMullan addressed the Committee and outlined the details of the motion, as follows:

*“Following other cities, including London and Dublin, this Council will work with relevant stakeholders to facilitate how residents can organise Playful Streets in Belfast.*

*Playful Streets are a low cost and easy way to turn residential streets into play spaces allowing children and communities to come together and play through limiting or closing access to vehicles for a few hours.*

*We will invite Playful Cities Ireland to present to Council members at a future Committee meeting and for council officers to engage with the pilots currently being carried out by Fingal County Council this summer.*

*This Council will then seek to pilot the same in Belfast in 2024 across the four quarters of the city and the city centre with a view to introduce a council led system through which residents can apply to make their street a Playful Street.”*

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the proposer of the motion, agreed to amend the motion to include School Street Pilots alongside Playful Street Pilots.

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

The Committee:

- agreed that a report on how this would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be submitted to a future meeting; an
- it also agreed to receive a presentation at a future meeting from Playful Cities Ireland regarding the scheme and to extend an invitation to the Forward South Partnership to provide an overview regarding the Residents' Parking Scheme in South Belfast.

**Committee/Strategic Issues**

**Pitches Strategy Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 To update the Committee regarding the commissioning of a new 10 year Pitches Strategy for Belfast.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- i. Note the timeline for the commissioning and production of the new 10 year Pitches Strategy.
- ii. Note the Terms of Reference for the strategy.

**3.0 Main report**

**Key Issues**

**3.1 Council developed a playing pitches strategy for the period 2011-2021 which was agreed in February 2012. The strategy included action plans under 3 key objectives:**

- Objective 1-Capital Investment
- Objective 2-Management
- Objective 3-Sports Development

**3.2 The growth in participation numbers across a number of sports since the Covid Pandemic has created increased demand for pitches and other outdoor sports facilities.**

**3.3 Due to the increased demand and a number of approaches from elected members, sports Governing Bodies and Belfast based Sports Clubs the need has been identified to commission a new 10 year “Belfast Pitches Strategy”.**

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- 3.4 Any new strategy and the subsequent work arising will need to align with the wider Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy currently under development and any future plans under Leisure Development. The new pitches strategy will need to be supported with a financial strategy in terms of funding opportunities from both council and other partners.**
- 3.5 In the interim, officers will continue to work on an area by area basis to identify, agree and secure quick wins for all sports at our existing sites.**
- 3.6 Indicative timeline for commissioning and production of strategy**

<b>Agree Terms of reference for the production of the strategy</b>	<b>July 2023 Completed</b>
<b>Identify and appoint external consultant to produce the strategy</b>	<b>August - September 2023</b>
<b>Background review of documentation policies and strategies</b>	<b>October 2023</b>
<b>Initial face to face consultation with key stakeholders and schools</b>	<b>November 2023</b>
<b>Review and Mapping</b>	<b>November – December 2023</b>
<b>Wider public consultation to take place online using “Your Say Belfast”</b>	<b>January - February 2024</b>
<b>Analysis of key issues identified with a focus on internal consultation and external feedback</b>	<b>February - March 2024</b>
<b>Interim Draft Report produced and presented to elected members for discussion</b>	<b>March - April 2024</b>
<b>Draft Strategy to be released for public consultation</b>	<b>April - May 2024</b>
<b>Analyse feedback from consultation and amend/update strategy</b>	<b>June 2024</b>
<b>Final Strategy to be presented to elected members</b>	<b>August 2024</b>
<b>Strategy Launched</b>	<b>September 2024</b>

**3.7 Terms of Reference**

**Senior officers met with party group leaders and discussed the draft terms of reference and their feedback is incorporated into the terms of reference below.**

- i. To produce a strategy for the development and management of all outdoor sport facilities in Belfast, which will maximise opportunities to realise Belfast Agenda outcomes.
- ii. To undertake a baseline assessment of existing outdoor sports facilities in Belfast and to identify which sports are using each facility.
- iii. To map existing Belfast sports clubs, their current home facilities, and their membership profile.
- iv. To provide an analysis of how existing facility provision supports participation in the diverse range of outdoor sports.
- v. To provide an analysis of how existing facility provision supports participation in by a diverse range of users.
- vi. To undertake a baseline assessment of current demand for facilities by outdoor sports.
- vii. To identify the changes required to Belfast's sports facility provision, prioritise changes based on an assessment of future need and create an action plan with short, medium and long term goals.
- viii. To predict the anticipated financial resource requirement to deliver the prioritised changes to facility provision.
- ix. To review the existing process for allocation of Belfast City Council facilities.

### **3.8 Financial and Resource Implications**

Costs associated with the development of the new strategy and engagement of external partners will be met within existing departmental resources. Members are advised that no capital and limited revenue finance is in place to support a strategy action plan at this stage. Financial implications and prioritisation will be included as the strategy is developed.

### **3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

The draft strategy will be screened in line with the Council's agreed process."

Following discussion, the Committee noted:

- the timeline for the commissioning and production of the new 10-year Pitches Strategy;
- the Terms of Reference for the strategy, noting that the strategy would consider all pitches across the city, not just Council owned facilities, and it would consider less popular sporting activities, with a view to ensuring that the demand for such facilities was future proofed and not based on current demand which was growing;

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- that officers were aware of the new timeline for planning regulations regarding the use of micro plastics and that these were being factored into any future considerations; and
- that updates would be provided to the Committee in due course, including information regarding the key stakeholders.

**Belfast City Youth Council Update**

As reported at the June meeting of Committee, the Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that the key focus of work currently was reviewing and designing the recruitment process and engagement approach to encourage applications from young people across the city.

The Members noted that over the summer months the Youth Council representatives would be prioritising outreach with youth providers and youth services to promote recruitment. This would include regular social media posts, e-shots, mailing, emailing, telephone calls and face to face contact with a wide range of groups to try and ensure that a diverse range of young people received an opportunity to apply to BCYC. In addition, contact would be made with youth organisations in each of the 10 Council DEAs as well as larger citywide organisations, including the following;

- Youth Work Alliance;
- Voluntary Sector Youth Providers;
- Street Beat;
- Community Restorative Justice;
- Shankill Alternatives;
- Common Youth;
- Transgender NI;
- ACT Initiative;
- Rainbow project;
- EA Youth Service;
- R City;
- NIYF;
- NICCY;
- Extern;
- Volunteer NOW;
- Cara Friend; and
- Belfast Met.

The officer advised that new Youth Champion nominees had been sought from the Party Group Leaders and, once confirmed, these Members would be invited to attend a meeting with the Belfast City Youth Council members.

The Committee noted the content of the report relating to the Belfast City Youth Council and the list of groups that would be contacted as part of the recruitment exercise for new

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

members and agreed to contact the Young People's Co-ordinator directly if they had any further suggestions.

**Active Belfast Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to:**

- **Seek approval for use of Belfast City Council's (BCC) allocation of £90,000 to support Active Belfast Partnership (ABP) in 2023/24 to deliver the programme of activity detailed in the report**
- **Update members on delivery of the first Participatory Budgeting (PB) programme delivered through the Active Belfast Partnership**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The committee is asked to:**

- **Approve the use of the BCC allocation of £90,000 to support ABP in 2023/24 to deliver the programme of activity detailed in the report.**
- **Note the update in relation to delivery of the first Participatory Budgeting (PB) programme delivered through the Active Belfast Partnership**

**3.0 Main report**

**Background**

**3.1 Active Belfast Partnership is a multi-agency partnership supporting physical activity and healthy eating in Belfast. It is jointly funded by BCC (£90,000) and Public Health Agency (PHA). PHA advised on 19th July that they were applying a 3.54% uplift to their allocation for 2023/24 providing £181,141. The BCC contribution remains at £90,000 which means the total budget for 2023/24 is £271,141. Physical activity and healthy eating remain priority areas within the refreshed Belfast Agenda as well as wider health-focussed strategic documents. AB therefore, both as an approach and as a partnership, plays a vital role in facilitating collaboration with key partners to take forward relevant and novel approaches.**

**3.2 Members may note that in January 2023 approval was given for the Active Belfast Partnership to use £64,000 of the 2023/24 budget to**

allocate funding awards made through its Participatory Budgeting programme for the delivery of activity in 2023/24. (£26,000 from BCC and £38,000 from PHA). At that time officers advised that a planning session to identify and agree priorities for 2023/24, alongside associated spend profiles would be held early in 2023 and that committee would receive an update following that meeting. However, due to the absence of key staff the meeting did not take place until May 2023 and the tabling of this report was delayed as a result.

- 3.3 In the interim, SP&R committee considered what level of Council contribution would be directed to support micro-medium grants in June 2023 as part of the spending review. The 2023/24 allocation from Active Belfast of £79,940.00 was included in this discussion and has been included in the overall budget for these awards.

3.4 Proposed Active Belfast 2-23/24 Budget Profile

The table below lists the recommended allocation for 2023/24 following discussions with partners. The PHA uplift which was made available on 19th July has not been reflected in this table and ABP will agree the allocation of this uplift at its next meeting. The rationale for supporting listed projects is as follows;

Previously agreed by BCC for 2023/24;

- PB Project – spend approved in January 2023 to support delivery of this programme which has tested more participative and innovative methods of engaging citizens in programme delivery. Allocations have been made through the ‘Move more, eat well to feel better’ brand.
- Micro-Medium Grants – Given the level of demand for these projects, the quality of applications and number supporting AB priorities there was agreement from partners that supporting these grants would support delivery of AB outcomes. The BCC AB contribution was accepted as part of the allocation of funds by SP&R in June 2023.

3.5 Elements to be agreed by BCC for 2023/24;

- Jog Belfast – This would represent the same amount of funding allocated for 22/23. Allocation of funding will support 7 sites across the City of Belfast, within North, South, West and East to deliver 3 programmes across the year. The Jog Belfast model, and how it is resourced going forward, will be a priority item for consideration by members of the ABP in 23/24
- Active Belfast Innovation Projects – Partners are developing proposals that will support innovative practice

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

and the financial resource listed in the table is requested to support delivery.

- **Resources/Training** – This budget is requested to enhance the technical support that is provided by Community Places in relation to delivery of the PB project.

<b><u>Proposed</u></b>			
<b><u>Expenditure 2023/24</u></b>	<b>BCC</b>	<b>PHA</b>	<b>Total</b>
Micro-Medium grants	£ 39,970.00	£ 39,970.00	<b>£ 79,940.00</b>
<b>Partnership innovation projects</b>			
Pilot Participatory funding	£ 26,000.00	£ 38,000.00	<b>£ 64,000.00</b>
<b>Business continuity</b>			
Jog Belfast (£42000 - 7 sites x 3)	£ 9,133.00	£ 32,867.00	<b>£ 42,000.00</b>
Active Belfast Innovation Projects	£ 14,457.60	£ 30,371.60	<b>£ 44,829.20</b>
Resources/Training	£ 439.40	£ 4,791.40	<b>£ 5,230.80</b>
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£ 90,000.00</b>	<b>£ 146,000.00</b>	<b>£ 236,000.00</b>

### **3.6 Update on the Participatory Budgeting (PB) pilot**

Members may wish to note the following update in relation to the PB programme.

The Move More and Eat Well to Feel Better Participatory Budgeting (PB) pilot, offered local groups the opportunity to apply for up to £1000 to fund projects that would help people in their local area to move more and eat well. Unlike other grant applications, with PB the people of Belfast got to decide which projects got funded by voting for the projects they would like to see happen in their area.

- 46 applications were received (1 was ineligible)
- 31 applicants were constituted, 15 were non constituted
- 4 voting/ decision making events took place. Three were held in venues across the city, one was held online. A total of 2497 voters cast 11,715 valid votes



**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- 27 projects were successful, 19 were delivered by constituted groups, 8 by non-constituted groups. There was a good spread of successful projects across the city.
- A celebration event which will be attended by all groups will take place in City Hall on 22 November 23.

Up to date information on the initiative can be found at:  
<https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/hub-page/participatory-budgeting>

**Financial and Human Resource Implications**

- 3.7 All activity outlined in this report can be delivered within existing budgets.
- 3.8 Staff from within the Belfast Health Development Unit (BH DU) will continue to lead on this work. Oversight will be provided at organisational level by Nicola Lane within BCC and David Tumilty within PHA, as well as at a partnership/thematic level with the stakeholders involved in the ABP.

**Equality or Good Relations/Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.9 The Participatory Budgeting programme has been equality screened and all other activity will be delivered with due regard to an equality/good relations and rural needs considerations.”

The Committee:

- approved the use of the Belfast City Council allocation of £90,000 to support Active Belfast Partnership in 2023/24 to deliver the programme of activity detailed in the report; and
- noted the update in relation to the delivery of the first Participatory Budgeting (PB) programme delivered through the Active Belfast Partnership.

**Quarter 4 Year End Committee Plan - Update**

The Committee was presented with the Quarter 4 update report in relation to the Committee Plan that had been agreed by the Committee in June 2022.

The Director of City Services referred the Members to a table in Appendix 1 that provided detail and commentary on the progress of all 33 actions. She explained that this table set out the work undertaken by the Department to deliver the key priorities, to the end of Q4 2022/23. It was highlighted that 33 actions had been identified across the Department's three Directorates. Of these, 4 had been completed, 19 were currently on track, 5 were considered at risk and were slightly delayed and a further 5 actions were considered to be behind schedule and would require additional resources to ensure their completion in the next financial year.

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

The Committee was reminded of the resource, capacity and resilience pressures that the City and Neighbourhood Services Department had experienced during 2022-23. It noted that recent recruitment exercises had provided some additional resources which would assist with the progress of those actions currently considered to be delayed, though it was anticipated that some of these actions would be carried into the 2023-24 Department Business Plan, where completion was more realistically achievable.

The Members noted the content of the year-end report and progress against the business plan and that a further report detailing the 2023-24 Committee Plan would be submitted in due course. It further:

- noted the ongoing staff resource pressures which were still having an impact on the delivery of key programs of work, however, welcomed the initiatives being taken by officers to work with Corporate HR on innovation with the recruitment process;
- agreed that officers would investigate if an apprenticeship programme could be introduced within the Pest Control Service;
- encouraged the targeting of woman to driver positions and incentives such as job-share and part-time working being promoted within these roles;
- noted that an update in respect of the use of smaller vehicles within the cleansing fleet would be provided to the next meeting of the Cleansing Task Force;
- noted concern that no progress had been made in respect of biodiversity work due to staff resources and budget, an update was sought in respect of how much it was anticipated this workstream would take to progress; and
- agreed that an update on Alleygates would be submitted to the September meeting providing an update on the recent consultation undertaken.

**Physical Programme and Asset Management**

**The Bullring DFC/BSC Capital Project**

The Committee considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 To update members on the progress of the DFC/BSC funded Bullring capital project including the formal park opening; proposed process for naming the new park and keyholder arrangements for the community garden/allotments and MUGA.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- 1. Note the update and formal opening arrangements for the new park.**

2. Agree the preparation of a keyholding agreement for the community garden with Lower Shankill Community Association and Denmark Street Community Centre.
3. Note the process for naming the new park including the shortlisted names for the public vote on the Council's Your Say website. The result of that vote will be reported back to this Committee.

**3.0 Main report**

- 3.1 The Department for Communities, through its Building Successful Communities programme, has funded two public realm projects in Lower Falls and Lower Shankill. The Westlink Sports Activity Park (which was its working title for funding purposes) is situated at the Divis 'Back Path' area located between the rear of Cullingtree Road and the Westlink. Now renamed Páirc an Lonnáin, it was opened to the public in early July 2021 following a major £1m development, creating a valuable new asset for residents in this part of the west of the city.
- 3.2 The Bullring project is larger in scale. The finished asset will, alongside improved hard and soft landscaping, include:
  - A MUGA
  - Play area for 0-3years and 3-6 years
  - Exercise Equipment
  - Self-contained Community Garden including toilet facility
  - Allotments
- 3.3 Appendix 1 contains a Planning Drawing of The Bullring Public Realm proposals.
- 3.4 The expected completion date is the end August 2023. In line with recommendations made by the SP&R committee in October 2016, the Bullring will transfer to council with 3 years of maintenance funding from DFC at an annual value of £35,000. The site will be managed and maintained by the relevant Open Spaces Street Scene team within City and Neighbourhood Services.
- 3.5 The Bullring site includes a securely fenced and gated area for a community garden with raised beds which can be made available to individuals and/or community groups for growing. This area also includes a WC, storage shed and water taps. Throughout the construction period, CNS officers have engaged with DfC and with local community representatives, including Lower Shankill Community Association and Denmark Street Community Centre, via a local stakeholder group, to prepare for the handover of the park. The Parks Outreach and Events Team have been helping prepare for the handover with a particular focus on how the

community garden can be managed over late summer and autumn of 2023.

### **3.6 Keyholding**

Given the importance of facilitating access to the community garden for watering and weeding, across the breadth of times when users will want to work there, it is proposed to enter into a keyholder agreement for the community garden and the MUGA with Lower Shankill Community Association and Denmark Street Community Centre. This reflects the approach at other community gardens and allotments such as Glenbank, Grove, Musgrave and Knocknagoney. In respect of the MUGA, it also follows the approach agreed at Páirc an Lonnáin, where Falls Residents' Association have a keyholder agreement which has allowed them to programme activity on the site outside normal park opening hours.

### **3.7 Naming**

The former Parks & Leisure Committee, at its meeting in August 2008, agreed a policy framework for managing requests to name parks. The policy follows a 4-stage process and has also previously been used to (re)name a bridge on the Connswater Community Greenway, Páirc an Lonnáin (the former Divis Back Path referred to above) and Páirc Nua Chollann (the new park funded by Urban Villages at Colin). These stages are;

- Engagement with key stakeholders to develop a long list of new park names, which reflect;
  - a sense of place, reflecting the geographic location, community, neighbourhood or street where the park, facility or amenity is located.
  - the historical significance of the area or reflects unique characteristics of the site (unique flora / fauna).
- Shortlisted names based on stakeholder feedback and assessed against the policy criteria as outlined above;
- Community consultation on the agreed shortlisted names;
- Recommendation to People and Communities Committee to reflect preferred name identified via the community consultation.

- 3.8 Names will not be considered which:**
- **Cause confusion due to duplication or names sounding similar to existing named facilities/locations within the City.**
  - **Unlawfully discriminate within the meaning and scope of the provisions of Section 75, the Good Relations Plan (2007) and the Shared Future agenda.**
  - **Are party-political in intention or use.**
- 3.9 There is strong support in the local area to rename the Bullring site because of previous associations with anti-social behaviour and other incidents in the area where the new park has been built.**
- 3.10 In line with the policy framework, local stakeholders have come together to develop a list of potential names for the former Bullring site and a panel (including nominated members of the Bullring Stakeholder Group which was the local reference group for the development and a local councillor) have considered the submissions against the criteria in the Council's policy framework.**
- 3.11 Engagement took place via the local summer scheme programmes and after schools programmes at the Hammer and Denmark Street Community Centres in June and July 2023. This was successful in gathering ideas from local children and their parents as well as local community groups. A total of 57 suggested names were received and following discussion with the Panel the following three names are proposed for public consultation in line with Council policy:**
- 1. Angel Park: In 2010/11 the Lower Shankill Youth Project which operated from Denmark Street Community Centre successfully worked with a number of young people who were engaging in anti-social behaviour in the area to change behaviours. The project came to be referred to locally as the 'Lower Shankill Angels' and NIHE funded a statue of an angel to acknowledge its achievements. The statue is currently located at Peter's Hill but will be relocated to the new park when it is completed;**
  - 2. Lower Shankill Park: this proposed name is a straightforward reflection of the geographical location of the new park;**
  - 3. Rock Roots Park: this suggestion emerged from engagement with children and their parents during summer programmes and after school programmes. Staff at the community centres discussed the experience of watching**

the park being built with local children, focussing on what they saw. The children spoke about the rocks and rubble on site when development started with 'muck' replaced by grass and how they have seen it transformed from the 'roots' with trees, flowers and plants. From these ideas they settled on a suggested name of Rock Roots Park

- 3.12 In line with the Council's naming policy framework, Committee approval is now being sought to carry out a full public consultation using the Council's Your Say Citizenspace around these naming options. The results of this consultation will then be brought back to Committee seeking approval to select the final name of the park.

It is expected that final recommendations on the official name for the new park at the former Bullring in Lower Shankill will be tabled for consideration again at People and Communities Committee in autumn 2023.

3.13 Financial and Resource Implications

In line with recommendations made by SP&R committee in October 2016, the Bullring will transfer to Council with 3 years of maintenance funding from DFC at an annual value of £35,000. Consideration will need to be given to revenue funding for this asset at the appropriate point in the budget estimating cycle to align to the end of the 3 year DFC funded period. The site will be managed and maintained by the relevant Open Spaces Street Scene team within City and Neighbourhood Services.

3.14 Equality or Good Relations Implications/  
Rural Needs Assessment

The naming process followed will be in line with the Council's naming policy and the chosen name will be screened in line with the Council's equality process."

The Committee adopted the recommendations as outlined at 2.0 of the report.

Operational Issues

Proposal for dual language street signs

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at Mica Drive, Coolnasilla Park South, Haypark Avenue, Eliza Street Terrace, Friendly Street, Rossnareen Avenue, St James Parade, St Judes Square, Lagmore View Road, Ashgrove Park, La Salle Park and Mill Valley Road.

## **Responsible Dog Ownership**

The Committee considered the following report:

### **“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 To provide members of the People and Communities Committee with an update on addressing better responsible dog ownership, in particular:**

- **The Committee noted the previous update at the meeting on 7 March 2023 and requested a Members’ Workshop to discuss the issues and potential solutions to dog fouling in the city in more detail.**
- **Actions taken following the Members’ Workshop on 25 April 2023 on Tackling Dog Fouling in the City; and**
- **The deferred decision regarding proposed changes to Fixed Penalty Fines for dog fouling offences and littering offences.**

### **2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Note the actions and outcomes following the Members’ Workshop on 25 April 2023.**
- **Reconsider Options 1 – 3 in relation to the new fixed penalty limits for dog fouling and agree a preferred option.**
- **Consider Option 4 - applying any changes made to the fixed penalty limits for dog fouling offences to littering offences.**

### **3.0 Main Report**

#### **3.1 PART 1 – Members’ Workshop**

**3.2 A Members’ Workshop on responsible dog ownership and the tackling of dog fouling in the city took place on 25 April 2023. An overview of the Dog Warden Service was followed with fouling statistics and trends; the challenges when tackling dog fouling and updates from the various teams in the Council with responsibility for tackling dog fouling.**

**3.3 Sixteen actions have been grouped under eight headings and since the workshop, officers in the Dog Warden Service, Environmental Education and Outreach Team, Corporate**

Marketing and Communications, Open Spaces and Streetscene and the Performance and Improvement Unit have held further workshops and been working through these actions.

**DATA**

3.4 **ACTION 1 – Consider how best to use data from street inspections / street index data or other data sources to identify hot spots and look at impact. Consider how best to provide data to Members.**

3.5 **A full analysis of the available data was carried out and the key findings were:**

- **Customer complaints in relation to dog fouling increased by 14% from 21/22 (889) to 22/23 (1013).**
- **The data from the Council’s Quality Monitoring Survey evidences a seasonal trend to dog fouling, where there is increased dog fouling in the winter months (December – February) compared with the summer months (June – August). This same seasonal trend has been identified in customer complaints recorded by the Customer Hub. It shows from about November to March in both 2021/22 and 2022/23 there was a sharp rise in complaints.**
- **The number of fixed penalties and revenue from the fines are currently low. Fouling detection patrols are resource intensive and are carried out in pairs. We are continuing to review the opportunity for fouling detection patrols against the other demands on the Dog Wardens time.**
- **There was a greater number of people with dog licences pre-pandemic than post pandemic.**

3.6 **Outcome 1 - We will continue to use the data from complaints (via public and Members) and the Quality Monitoring Surveys to target hot spot areas and direct resources. Resources permitting, additional fouling patrols will operate between December and February. We are continuing to work towards pre-pandemic levels of enforcement activity. A licensing intervention has been introduced with an additional resource secured to tackle the backlog. Open Spaces and Streetscene will review the available data and determine how best to circulate future performance information.**

3.7 **ACTION 2 – Benchmark other locations with good practice.**

**We restricted our benchmarking to Northern Ireland as we felt that other NI authorities would provide information that was most**



relevant to Belfast in managing these issues. 8 of the 10 councils responded. We asked a series of questions about fouling patrols; dog enclosures; dog control orders; signage; stencilling; provision of free poo bags and use of dispensers. We also reviewed the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Briefing 2019 which collated a list of good ideas from local authorities across the UK:

- The Green Dog Walkers Scheme
- Rewards for residents reporting fouling
- Chalk stencils with messages being painted onto pavements
- Highlighting fouling with bright coloured sprays
- Glow-in-the-dark posters to target night-time fouling
- Dog Watch Schemes – inspired by Neighbourhood Watch Schemes
- A Council reporting app that allows individuals to identify the location of fouling

3.8 Outcome 2 – Where appropriate the benchmarking findings have been included in the relevant actions below.

3.9 **ACTION 3 – Survey / updated research**

We reviewed available research including that commissioned by BCC and carried out by QUB (Canine Behaviour Centre, School of Psychology) in 2004 and 2009. We have re-engaged with QUB and are hoping to work with the university in the coming academic year to draw up a strategy for new research that will be tailored to our needs. However, the university has stressed that resources are limited and any research will need to be conducted within very tight parameters.

3.10 We also reviewed the most recent research from the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Briefing 2019 which included findings from local authorities across the UK. It notes dog fouling is one of the most prevalent issues for local authority environmental services. It is particularly difficult to tackle for a number of reasons:

- People are aware they could be fined, but many do not think they will ever be caught;
- Fouling can happen at any time of day or night, so patrolling often will not catch the offenders;
- Residents are (rightfully) hesitant to confront residents who persistently allow their dog to foul;
- Prosecution requires good evidence;
- Attempts to introduce new dog controls to combat dog fouling can lead to a public

- backlash;
- The public is still largely unaware that (in many areas) they can dispose of dog waste in any available local authority litter bin;
- Many people do not consider leaving dog waste bags on the ground fouling.

- 3.11 Outcome 3 – We will continue to engage with QUB regarding opportunities for bespoke research. We will seek to increase awareness of successful prosecutions and will work to address the difficulties listed above through our education programme.

**MESSAGING - EDUCATIONAL MESSAGING VIA LEAFLET DOOR DROPS**

- 3.12 **ACTION 4 – Build on current leaflet drops with public awareness messaging in identified hot spot areas.**

This is a cost effective and visible action. However, it does have limitations. If we leaflet a street with significant dog fouling, it is not necessarily the residents of that street that are allowing dogs to foul in their own street. In an attempt to mitigate for this we will normally leaflet several surrounding streets. Fouling in gated alley ways can be attributed to specific houses with access to the alley way and only those houses would be targeted through leafleting.

Outcome 4 – Dog Wardens will continue to leaflet houses in hot spot areas. Colleagues in our Enforcement Team, who tackle littering, will continue to assist with leaflet drops.

- 3.13 **ACTION 5 – Humanise the message, make messaging local. Harder hitting – health impacts / implications, especially to children.**

- 3.14 The ‘think again’ dog fouling campaign was launched during October/November 2022, with a second burst of activity in February 2023 and it has recently been shortlisted for a CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations) Pride Award for best Integrated Campaign. Our objective was to create a campaign using real insights and research to help influence behaviour change by encouraging dog owners to pick up after their dog, take responsibility and Think Again! The campaign used integrated communications consisting of heavyweight advertising, social media and innovative PR.

- 3.15 Independent research was commissioned to evaluate the paid for advertising element of the campaign and it found that 93% recalled the message; 80% said the artwork was understandable and 72% said its greatest benefit was encouraging dog owners to take responsibility. As the ‘think again’ campaign is so new Marketing

and Corporate Communications have recommended that we do not invest in a new campaign creative until 2025/26 in order to let the 'Think Again' campaign embed and percolate. The current campaign shows the consequences of not cleaning up after your dog. Future campaigns could focus on the perpetrator (hopefully the QUB research will help us identify main perpetrators) and creative approach would also be reviewed at this time to incorporate feedback from the workshop such as the possibility of having Belfast identifiable images within advertising assets.

3.16 Outcome 5 – We plan to develop a new campaign creative in 2024/25 (for use in 2025/26) and will use up to date research to identify who to target and how best to deliver the message.

3.17 **ACTION 6 – Use of social media in future campaigns, particular focus on targeting hot spots, males under 30 etc. and the evaluation of impacts.**

Our integrated marketing campaigns already use a wide range of media formats (including social media) to target people during all aspects of their life, when at home before they walk their dog, when they are out walking their dog, when they are online and travelling to and from work. Hotspot areas are currently targeted within current dog fouling campaigns for example during the 'think again' campaign Adshel posters were located at hot spot areas.

3.18 Outcome 6 – Marketing and Corporate Communications team will select the most appropriate media channels in future campaigns to target hot spot areas based on findings/feedback and select the most effective ways of reaching perpetrators based on any new research findings.

3.19 **ACTION 7 – Further promotion of the Green Dog Walker scheme to reward positive behaviour.**

Our Environmental Education and Outreach Team promote this scheme in our parks during summer fun days with Scoop Dog and also support this scheme with social media activity. (See Appendix 1 & 2) Anyone signing up to the scheme must have a licence for their dog so the scheme is raising awareness of the licensing requirements too. By taking the Green Dog Walkers' pledge and using a Green Dog Walker's lead, owners commit to:

- always clean up after their dog;
- carry extra dog waste bags;
- give free dog waste bags to other dog walkers.

3.20 Outcome 7 – We will continue to promote our successful Green Dog Walker scheme.

**3.2.1 MARKETING – SIGNAGE**

**ACTION 8 – Signage in parks / on street, consider positioning / visibility and work with communities on location.**

Our Open Spaces and Streetscene colleagues in parks will continue to use signage at appropriate locations throughout our parks. Whilst we appreciate the role of signage and agree with Members that location is important, we are reluctant to encourage excessive signage. We believe the current level of street signage throughout the city is sufficient. We will however still consider requests for additional signage but need to be cognisant of the requirement for permission from the Department for Infrastructure should we want to erect signage on its property. As an alternative to street signage we have designed a poster (see Appendix 2) which we can be distributed to local communities in hot spot areas for indoor use.

**3.22 Outcome 8 – Open Spaces and Streetscene will continue to use signage in our parks. The Dog Warden Service and our Environmental Education and Outreach Team will continue to engage with communities and raise awareness of the new poster.**

**3.23 ACTION 9 – Signage: Consider materials, design bespoke signs for specific areas. Consider CCTV message as a deterrent, wardens patrolling this area etc.**

Through our benchmarking we have determined that all councils in NI use signs with a variety of construction materials including metal, Perspex, cortex and banners. There was a difference of opinion as to whether graphic signage or cute dogs were the best way to engage with dog owners. Some include the level of the fines on signage and others do not. Given the limitation to use DfI property for additional signage we have instead continued to develop our banners (See Appendix 4) that can be used on park and school railings. We will take account of all of the benchmarking information when developing our next campaign during 2024/25.

Members had suggested CCTV signage (similar to PSNI speed camera signage) to be used as a deterrent. We have taken advice and use of such signage, when we have no CCTV would mean we would intentionally be misleading the public and it would put us at odds with our own Code of Conduct. We already use social media as a deterrent by advising of current and future dog fouling patrols.

3.25 Outcome 9 – We will consider the benchmarking findings on signage when developing our next campaign. We will continue to use social media about dog fouling patrols as a deterrent.

3.26 ACTION 10 – Chase Dfl for permission to stencil. Review stencilling and its impact on changing behaviour.

Through our benchmarking we have determined that 7 of the 8 councils that responded use or have used stencilling. Anecdotally, it is considered to be better at raising awareness in the summertime. We have now received confirmation from Dfl that it does not object in principle to stencilling. However, we are required to contact the appropriate area manager for each location, to obtain permission, in advance of any stencilling. This is because stencilling can cause damage to certain pavement surfaces. We have already carried out a small pilot of stencilling at schools in East Belfast and are now waiting on permission from Dfl for hot spot schools in North, South and West Belfast. A Quality Monitoring Survey will be carried out before and after in N, S and W and we will then evaluate the effectiveness of stencilling.

3.27 Outcome 10 – Provided we obtain permission from Dfl we will undertake a small pilot of stencilling when the new school term starts and evaluate its effectiveness.

3.28 MARKETING – COMMUNITY

ACTION 11 – Actively encourage reporting, make reporting process for residents straightforward. Consider pros and cons of providing bag dispensers in certain locations for emergency use.

3.29 In the last year we have amended our online dog fouling reporting form. It has been broken down into several questions which prompt more detailed information and we have found the information provided is more useful for targeting hot spots / individuals. The ‘think again’ campaign also encouraged reporting and our colleagues who manage the social media channels always make a response when fouling is reported.

3.30 We recently ran a Billboard Challenge focused on dog fouling in Spring/ Summer School Term and had an excellent response with 19 schools participating. The Key Stage 2 pupils received an interactive, curriculum-based talk around dog fouling and the issues surrounding it. The pupils then designed their own billboards, and we had 4 winners (N/S/E/W) who had their artwork displayed on a local billboard. (See Appendix 5 & 6). The entries were such high quality we added 4 runners-up, who will receive their entries as a banner for their school. We received positive media coverage of this project.

- 3.31 From our bench marking all the responding councils provide free poo bags in variety of ways e.g. at pop up events, when on fouling patrols, via Green Dog Walker Scheme, in community centres and when sending out licence renewal letters. There were reports of complaints when supplies at council buildings ran out as dog owners mistakenly thought it was the council's role to provide bags. In Belfast we will continue to supply all community centres with free dog bags and a poster encouraging centre users to pick up free bags there.
- 3.32 Based on the costings for the dispensers that were installed in Belfast during the COVID pandemic we estimate each dispenser would cost in the region of £800 - £1000 to purchase and install. There would then be on-going refilling and maintenance costs. We have over 50 parks and open spaces and most have multiple entrances. The bench marking findings demonstrated some difficulties where poo bag dispensers were located outside – in one trial in 4 parks all the dispensers were either destroyed or stolen, another reported that dispensers were 'robbed' almost as soon as they were filled and vandalised dispensers are no longer being replaced. There is the potential when free poo bags are provided in parks for those observed committing an offence to use the lack of poo bags in the park dispenser as a defence. We firmly believe that purchasing poo bags is the responsibility of all dog owners and whilst provision of them at events or during fouling patrols is beneficial, the cost to provide them via dispensers is prohibitive and contradicts the message of responsible dog ownership.
- 3.33 Our Dog Wardens will continue to engage with the public to encourage reporting of dog fouling and to provide free poo bags where appropriate. Our Park Wardens will do the same within our parks.
- 3.34 Outcome 11 – We will continue to encourage reporting and to provide free dog poo bags at events, at community centres, during fouling patrols and in our engagement with visitors to our parks.
- 3.35 **SERVICE DELIVERY**
- ACTION 12 – Continue to deliver a visible response to reports of fouling.**
- 3.36 Through our benchmarking we determined that none of the 8 responding councils patrol 7 days a week as is the case in Belfast. All councils had some scope for variations in the timings of patrols to take account of problem areas, time of year etc. Two of the responding councils have used WISE Enforcement

(an external, self-funding company) to enhance / support their Dog Warden fouling patrols. There was no agreement about the best time of day to detect fouling and it was considered to be extremely difficult to detect and more opportunistic in witnessing rather than at planned locations and times. There was a mix of high viz and low viz patrols across the 8 councils with 3 using a blend of both.

3.37 Outcome 12 – We will continue to deliver a visible response to reports of fouling with the use of social media to highlight our activities.

3.38 **ACTION 13 – Consider dog enclosures in parks; more bins; more resources to deal with dog fouling; and more FIDO machines.**

3.39 Bench marking revealed that 5 of the 8 responding councils have separate dog enclosures in their parks. Within Belfast there are 2 dog enclosures – one at the Grove and one at Stormont. Previous Committee approval was granted in August 2018 with regards to pilot dog enclosures in the West, South & East, however, due to financial pressures, resourcing and Covid this was not progressed. The financial and resourcing pressures still exist, however, this will be refreshed and updated and taken back through the Area Working Groups and then to Committee for approval.

3.40 Outcome 13 – Officers to revisit and refresh the 2018 report and to include graffiti and other pressures such as Anti-Social Behaviour.

3.41 **ENFORCEMENT**

**Action 14 – Bring back report to Committee on increasing dog fouling fine to maximum of £200.**

3.42 Outcome 14 – See Part 2 of this Committee Report.

3.43 **LEGISLATION**

Action 15 – Consider if new legislation is needed.

3.44 There is provision within the existing legislation for Councils to decide to introduce Control Orders for specific scenarios and in Belfast we have one for dog fouling and one for the maximum number of dogs that can be walked by one person. A legal process which involves public consultation must take place before a council makes a dog control order. Back in 2012/23 the Council did consider Dog Control Orders for dogs on leads and exclusion zones but ultimately decided that more information / consultation was needed prior to introducing additional Dog Control Orders.

- 3.45 All but one of the responding councils have dog control orders including dog exclusion zones and dogs on leads. They apply at various locations e.g. in parks, cemeteries and other specified land owned by the Council and if appropriate at various times. They are restricted to Council owned land because the legislation states: *'No offence is committed where the person has a reasonable excuse for failing to keep the dog on a lead, or the owner, occupier or other person or authority having control of the land has consented (generally or specifically) to the person failing to do so.'*
- 3.46 The primary consideration is to balance the interests of those in charge of dogs against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs, bearing in mind the need for people, in particular children, to have access to dog-free areas and areas where dogs are kept under strict control, and the need for those in charge of dogs to have access to areas where they can exercise their dogs without undue restriction. Those who responded provided anecdotal evidence that fouling is less likely to happen when a dog is on a lead and our own Dog Wardens agree.
- 3.47 Outcome 15 – We already have Byelaws that require dogs to be kept on leads on certain council owned land but there are difficulties with enforcement (including lack of a fixed penalty) however a feasibility study could be carried out regarding the introduction of a Control Order for Dogs on Leads in our parks, cemeteries etc.

This is to be considered as part of the update report in Action 13.

3.48 **FINANCE**

Action 16 – Report back to Committee in August with costings of options where appropriate.

- 3.49 Where appropriate, estimated costings have been included under the relevant actions throughout the report. In addition a separate Committee Report, including costings for Action 13 will be submitted at a later date.

**PART 2 - PROPOSED CHANGES TO FIXED PENALTY FINES FOR DOG CONTROL OFFENCES**

- 3.50 In our report for Committee on 7 March 2023 we provided details of The Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 which came into force on 30 December 2022 and amend the previous 2012 Regulations. The effect is to alter the amount of a fixed penalty capable of being specified by the Council for certain fixed



penalties. We detailed 4 options for the Committee to review and after some discussion it was agreed to defer until a future meeting. 4 councils in NI have already increased their fines and we would ask that the options below are considering again.

**3.51 OPTIONS**

- Option 1 – no change
- Option 2 – increase to maximum of £200 with reduction if paid within 10 days. Suggested reduction to £100 as an incentive to pay the fixed penalty promptly and avoid court action.
- Option 3 – increase but not to maximum with reduction if paid within 10 days. Could be anything from £90 - £190, with any level of reduction.
- Option 4 – Consider applying any changes made to the fixed penalty limits for dog fouling offences to littering offences. The Council previously agreed to set the level of fixed penalty fine for littering at £80, reduced to £60 if paid within 10 days. There would be no additional signage costs as most signs include information about dog fouling and littering.

**3.52 Finance and Resource Implications**

**Part 1**

There is currently no additional budget available to implement any of newly the suggested outcomes in this report.

**Part 2**

There are cost implications if changes are required to signage. We do already have a budget for signage and cost varies depending on the size of the sign and the method of mounting but is in the region of £20 - £25 plus VAT each. The livery on some council vehicles would also need to be removed or updated.

**3.53 Asset and Other Implications**

None

**3.53 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment**

None.”

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

The Committee thanked the Director of City Services for the update report and detailed discussion ensued regarding the ongoing issues that had been highlighted at the workshop.

During discussion the following issues were, once again, discussed/highlighted:

- The lack of dog off lead facilities in parks and open spaces
- Undertaking a feasibility study for dog off lead facilities, citing Wallace Park in Lisburn as a good example;
- Noted the introduction of a new streamlined digital process and the rates charges for concessionary fees for dog licencing;
- Enhancing and localising the dog foul media campaign and also promoting and publicising the need for dog licences;
- Welcomed the stencilling campaign in east Belfast and sought to extend it to the south, north and west of the city (to include liaison with DfI in this regard);
- Discussion regarding the provision of free dog foul bags in problem areas within park locations and not just via community centres and publicising that they were available;
- Ensuring adequate bins for disposal were available for the disposal of dog waste and noted the importance of the location of these bins;
- The use of Fido machines and need to benchmark with other Councils;
- Ensuring adequate staff resources, with costings sought for what would be deemed to be necessary to improve the service;
- A suggestion that officers promote and give out advice regarding the Dogs Trust neutering scheme, which was available at a cost of £50 for dogs belonging to owners on means-tested benefits (for a restricted number of breeds);
- Sought the location and details of how many people had signed up to participate in the Green Walkers Scheme; and
- The development of responsible dog ownership campaigns in the Council's parks and playing field locations.

The Director highlighted to the Committee that it had previously decided not to increase the fixed penalty limits for dog and litter offences and asked the Members whether they wished revisit this again in light of discussions.

A number of Members stated that they would be opposed to increasing the fees at this stage and would be keen to see some of the other initiatives implemented prior to this measure being further considered.

Following discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,  
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Committee agrees to introduce option 2 and option 4, as detailed in the report.

On a vote, 6 Members voted for the proposal and 13 against and it was declared lost.

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

**Further Proposal**

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,  
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

That the Committee agrees to introduce option 2.

On a vote, 11 Members voted for the proposal and 8 against and it was declared carried.

The Committee therefore:

- agreed to adopt Option 2 in respect of fixed penalty limits for dog fouling and dog fouling offences - to increase the fine to a maximum of £200, with a reduction of £100 if paid within 10 days as an incentive to pay the fixed penalty promptly;
- agreed not to apply any changes to littering offences at this time and noted that an update report would be submitted to committee in due course.

**Requests for the use of Parks for 2023 events**

The Committee considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**Committee is asked to note that Council has received a number of requests from event organisers to host events across several city park locations in 2023. Committee is also asked to note that the request for use of Falls Park also includes a request for funding.**

- VC Glendale – Falls Park
- Penny for your Mental Health & Money Advice – Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park
- East side Partnership - Go Greenway Campaign
- North Belfast Lantern Parade – Alexandra Park

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That committee note the request for £8,207 funding support for the Falls Park event. It is recommended that officers will endeavour to signpost the club to other possible external funding streams for this year’s event and work with the club in future years to ensure they are aware of our funding streams.**

**The Committee is asked to grant authority to each of the applicants for the proposed events on the dates noted and to delegate authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to ensure the following:**

- i. Where appropriate negotiate a fee which recognises the costs to Council, minimises negative impact on the immediate area and takes account of the potential wider benefit to the city economy, in conjunction with the Councils Commercial Manager;
  - ii. Negotiate satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement prepared by the City Solicitor, including managing final booking confirmation dates and flexibility around 'set up' & take down' periods, and booking amendments, subject to:
    - The promoter resolving any operational issues to the Council's satisfaction.
    - The promoter meeting all the statutory requirements of the Planning and Building Control Service including the terms and conditions of the Park's Entertainment Licence.
- 2.2 Please note that the above recommendations are taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which is currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.
- 3.0 **Main report**  
  
**Key Issues**
- 3.1 If agreed, the event organisers will be required in advance of each event to submit an event management plan for approval by the Council and all relevant statutory bodies. This will include an assessment of how the event will impact upon the surrounding area and measures to mitigate these impacts.
- 3.2 **VC Glendale Falling Leaves - Falls Park**  
  
VC Glendale are a well-known local voluntary cycling club with a long history of producing some of the country's finest cyclists. The club was founded in 1981 by local Andersonstown men Mark Graham, Brian Holmes and Jimmy Watson to help local cyclists take part in cycling events during a very turbulent time in Belfast. The club quickly had established itself as one of the best cross community cycling clubs in Ireland with some of its members racing in major events such as The RAS (Ireland's premier event) and established races throughout Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and also representing Ireland at world events. The Falling Leaves event has taken place at Falls Park for the last 8 years and has been supported by BCC during its time at the park.

3.3 This event attracts riders and spectators far and wide from across Ireland as riders race for the points that ultimately influence their grid positions at National Championships. The event has become a well-established fixture on the cyclocross calendar, and it is hoped that another successful event at the venue could result in Falls Park being nominated as the venue for the Irish National championships in 2025.

3.4 This year the organisers have requested financial support from Council to assist with the delivery of the event and have submitted an expenditure budget to the department totalling £8207.00. It is important to note that the department does not have this funding in budget and at period 1 the Parks Events and Outreach team were already reporting an overspend on programming budgets due to the increase in activity and delivery costs.

The event would have been eligible for the Support for Sport grant but unfortunately the organisers did not submit an application. It is also important to note that an allocation of funds to this event outside a grant application process could set a precedent for requests from other event organisers.

3.5 The key dates for the event are as follows;

Saturday 16th September – 10am Set Up  
Saturday 16th September – 12pm to 3pm – Race Day  
Sunday 17th September - 8am to 4.30pm – Race Day  
Sunday 17th September- 8pm – Off Site

3.6 Penny for your Mental Health & Money Advice – Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park

MindWise New Vision has requested the great lawn at Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park to erect 4 tents to run a fundraising event for their mental health & money advice services. They are planning on carrying out a 24 hour walk around the park and wish to be able to use the park for this activity and raise money for their charity.

3.7 The key dates required are as follows:

Saturday 16th September – 8am Set Up  
Saturday 16th September 10am to Sunday 17th September – 24 hour walk  
Sunday 17th September 12pm – Leave Site

3.8 The organisation is a registered mental health charity that covers all of Northern Ireland.

**3.9 Go Greenway Campaign**

Eastside Greenways have submitted a request to Belfast City Council with regards their upcoming Go Greenway Campaign. The Council have worked closely with the organisation which is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding and Legal Agreement which was agreed in 2020.

**3.10 Diversifying income generation is a key priority for EastSide Greenways with a focus on ensuring the sustainability of the organisation beyond the life of the existing endowment.**

The partnership has employed the services of a branding company to develop and deliver a new branding campaign which will launch, promote and drive a new area of work focusing on fundraising through donations, corporate sponsorships and membership /patronage options.

**3.11 Eastside Greenways have requested that the council allow them to fundraise at their upcoming and future events to help raise funds for their campaign and this would be done via selling memberships and collections via charity boxes at any of their events. The group state that their fundraising will help support the following work:**

1. Supporting Belfast City Councils ongoing management and maintenance of the Greenway through engagement with volunteers and residents as well as the employment of a team of Greenway Leaders.
2. Developing and delivering an annual animation programme
3. Promoting the Greenway as a destination and as a best practice location through talks, tours and presentations
4. Engaging with local stakeholders year-round, working to address issues arising
5. Delivering on ESG strategic aims and objectives

**3.12 The group hope that the council will take this into consideration and grant permission for fundraising at their events.**

**3.13 North Belfast Lantern Parade – Alexandra Park**

New Lodge arts have requested the use of Alexandra Park for their annual Lantern Festival. This event has been held annually for a number of years without any issues arising during the course of the event.

**3.14 The event will include art installations, music, dance & theatre performances. It will also include inflatables for the young members of the community and will end with a Fireworks Display.**

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- 3.15 The event is ticketed with wristbands costing £2. The ticketed system has been used to date to manage attendance numbers. This is not for profit and all proceeds go towards covering the cost of the wrist band or activity delivered as part of the event.
- 3.16 In order to build the site safely and in a timely fashion, organisers have requested that the park might be closed to members of the public for a period of time on Friday 27 October and that only members of the public with tickets, can access the park on Saturday 28th from 2.00pm until the event ends at 10.00pm.
- 3.17 The Key Dates are as follows.
- Friday 27 October – 8am – Set Up  
Friday 27 October – 6pm Event Begins  
Saturday 28 October 10pm – End of Event  
Sunday 29 October – 12pm – Off Site
- 3.18 **Financial and Human Resource Implications**
- The request for funding of £8,207.00 for the Falls Park event is not included in any revenue budgets and there is no allocation to support ad hoc requests.
- 3.19 **Asset and Other Implications**
- Council officers will liaise with event organisers and promoters in relation to any potential environmental impact from events.
- 3.20 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**
- There are no known implications.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations at 2.0 of the report regarding use of the parks as requested and for permission to fundraise. It noted the request from VC Glendale Falling Leaves seeking financial support from the Council of £8,207 to assist with the delivery of its event at Falls Park and referred the request to the next meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and agreed that officers would liaise with the club to ensure that it was aware of the Council's various funding streams for future events.

**Sustainable Period Product Scheme**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

- “1.0 **Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the success of the Period Waste Scheme (March 2022 - current) and seek direction on future delivery.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1** The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and make a recommendation that the Environmental Education & Outreach team will cease provision from April 2024 given that:

- current demand appears to have been met through the first two pilot programmes;
- there is no available budget to run a third programme
- provision will be established through the new legislation

**2.2** The Committee is also asked to authorise the Director of City and Organisational Strategy to submit a formal written response on behalf of council, as outlined at 3.13, to the TEO consultation on the provision of free period products.

## **3.0 Main report**

### **Background**

**3.1** The aim of the Period Waste initiative was to raise awareness and encourage increased use of reusable period products. This will have an environmental benefit as it will reduce the amount of period waste that is entering our waste stream and being landfilled, and it will also reduce plastic waste. Disposal of single use menstrual products - tampons, pads and applicators generates 200,000 tonnes of waste per year in the UK<sup>1</sup>. In addition, sanitary waste can be made of up to 90% plastic.

**3.2** In the most recent BCC Waste Composition Study (2014) it was found that 1.87% of all miscellaneous combustible waste (the largest category of waste we collect) was of a sanitary waste nature (including other absorbent hygiene products but excluding nappies). This means each household was producing on average 3.38Kg of this type of product waste per year.

**3.3** This project was primarily focused on waste reduction but also had the benefit of providing a sustainable resource for those affected by period poverty which is an added pressure on individuals and families as a result of the current cost of living pressures.

**3.4** The pilot scheme was launched on 30 March 22 to unprecedented demand and in less than 24 hours the pilot had to be closed because of demand. Through the scheme we provided free access to reusable period products to 3,159 people in the Belfast area. Council worked with the social enterprise, 'Hey Girls'.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculation by Natracare 2018



[www.heygirls.co.uk](http://www.heygirls.co.uk)) to deliver the scheme, where participants could register and order reusable sanitary products online.

- 3.5 Social media coverage and feedback on the scheme was also very positive. Commentary praised Belfast City Council for bringing the initiative forward. Over 95,000 people were reached through Council social media on the topic with over 225,000 people having viewed twitter posts promoting the scheme.
- 3.6 Market research targeted at participants of the pilot found that 94.2% of respondent use the products they received all or some of the time. 43.5% said they no longer use single use period products and 86.9% say it has lessened their use of single use products. The project has recently been awarded the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful 'Behaviour Change Award for Tackling Single Use Plastic' for 22/23.
- 3.7 In August 22, SP&R approved expansion of the project and an additional budget allocation so that another tranche of the pilot could be delivered. This was launched in January 2023 and is currently ongoing. To date, 1770 individual orders of products have been processed during this phase of the pilot. As would be anticipated, the rate of requests for products has significantly decreased, given that products are reusable and therefore repeat orders from individuals would not be expected. This pilot continues to be promoted and it is projected that the remaining budget will be utilised by March 2024.
- 3.8 In addition to the extension of the pilot, a project with support from the Climate Change Fund was launched in June 2023. This project engages with partners in the Community Voluntary Sector (CVS) to provide them with reusable sustainable solutions to period poverty which they can then pass on to their service users. Officers have been engaging through women's groups and other CVS groups and have shared information with the Women's Steering Group as well as promoting the initiative through council's social media. Any group interested in becoming involved should email [EnvironmentalOutreach@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:EnvironmentalOutreach@belfastcity.gov.uk)

#### Future Considerations

- 3.9 Period products are essential items for personal care to address a normal biological need and should therefore be available to everyone who needs them, regardless of their economic status.
- 3.10 In recognition of this, the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) was made by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022 and requires that period products will be made available from May 2024. The requirements of the Act go beyond seeking to make provision

for those in financial difficulty, there is a recognition that period products are necessary and essential items that should be available free of charge and accessible by all persons who need to use them.

- 3.11 The Executive Office (TEO) is currently undertaking a public consultation process which is seeking views on how best the Executive Office (TEO) can ensure that period products are 'obtainable free of charge' by 'all persons who need to use them', 'while in Northern Ireland'. Further detail on the background is contained in the full consultation document available here: [www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-free-period-products](http://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-free-period-products).
- 3.12 A reasonable choice is required by the Act. Within the Act 'products' are defined to include tampons, sanitary towels and articles which are reusable. It is anticipated that there will be an expectation that council will be a partner in the delivery of this service though no details are available at this stage.
- 3.13 The TEO consultation survey is predominantly seeking the views of those who use period products and/or who buy products on behalf of other family members. Therefore, whilst it would not be appropriate for council to answer the TEO these questions, it is recommended that council should submit a letter of response outlining our support for the need for period products to be offered to everyone as they are essential items for personal care to address a normal biological need and should therefore be available to everyone who needs them, regardless of their economic status. In addition, we will request early engagement with Council to explore our role in any delivery mechanism which is envisaged. Our response will also highlight the learning we have gained from our pilot initiatives on period poverty (as part of our Gender Equality Plan and linked, Belfast City Council launched a pilot offering free period products for the public in council buildings and facilities and free access to reusable period products and) and stress the importance of ongoing collaboration around this issue.

#### Recommendations for Reusable Period Product Pilot

- 3.14 The legislative requirement to be introduced by the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 will ensure that period products are available to individuals to ensure period dignity. The reasonable choice element will supersede the reusable period product pilot in that individuals can request reusable items within the legislation.

**3.15 Given that;**

- **current demand appears to have been met through the first two pilot programmes;**
- **there is no available budget to run a third programme**
- **provision will be established through the new legislation**

**It is recommended that the pilot does not continue after March 2024.**

**Financial and Resource implications**

**3.16 To match the initial scheme would mean a further £50,000 budget which is not within existing budgets.**

**3.17 For reference, participants could choose to order a Full Cycle Pack (containing 1 x reusable pantyliner, 2 x day reusable pads and 2 x night reusable pads) to the value of £21.40 per pack or approximately £12.99 for a Period Cup Combo (including all associated costs).**

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

**3.18 The pilot scheme was designed to be accessible to as many residents in the Belfast area as possible.”**

Several Members noted that they were pleased with the success of the scheme and hopeful that the introduction of the new legislation would help to ensure that period products would now be available to individuals to ensure period dignity.

A Member encouraged officers to join up with schools to maximise value for the Council scheme prior to its cessation in April 2024.

The Committee noted the report and agreed the recommendations as outlined at 2.0 of the report, with the addition that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy, in his written response, on behalf of Council, as outlined at 3.13 of the report, to the TEO consultation also highlight the Committees' concern regarding the budget cuts and withdrawal of funding by the Department of Education for the scheme.

**Product Safety update**

The Committee considered a report highlighting the continuation of funding to support Belfast City Council's activity in the area of product safety regulation.

The Members were reminded that, at the February 2023 meeting, the Committee had agreed to avail of in year (2022/23) grant funding, totalling £120,000 which had been made available from the Department of Business Enterprise and Skills (Office of Product Standards and Safety, OPSS) to support Councils work in relation to:

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

- ensuring that businesses involved in the importation, supply or sale of goods complied with their legal obligations and to ensure that goods presented on the market did not present risk of harm or injury to consumers; and
- building capacity and capability of the service to understand and deliver requirements of the legislation, and to build strong working relationships with key partners and businesses.

The Members were advised that OPSS had now extended both grant funding programmes. Officers had reviewed the 2 available grant funding offers and had confirmed that Belfast City Council would be eligible to claim the available funding, in full, in line with the eligibility criteria.

The Members were advised that it was possible that these programmes might continue beyond the 2023/24 financial year, with further grant funding offers in future years. Therefore, to assist the Council in planning for delivery and to draw down future funding in a timely manner, approval was sought to avail of extended funding opportunities under these programmes should they become available in 2024/25 or beyond.

The Committee agreed to avail of the continued grant funding offers to support Belfast City Council's work on product safety in 2023/24 and any subsequent extensions over future years, if made available.

**Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

**Street Sign Format – Councillor McKeown**

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor McKeown addressed the Committee and explained that he wished for the Council to take the opportunity presented by the roll-out of new bilingual street signs to:

- explore the use of cló Gaelach, or an appropriate adaptation, for Irish language wording on bilingual street signs in Belfast, bearing in mind that accessibility assessment if required should be judged against the standards for this script format rather than Roman script;
- explore the possibilities to use a distinctive font for English language wording on all street signs to create a unique 'Belfast character' which will be readily identifiable as a feature of the city. This could echo, for example, fonts used on traditional black tiled signs, meeting accessibility requirements; and
- explore options around other scripts that may be required for bilingual signage in future, relating to other languages, to avoid any delays in delivering any such signage.

A number of Members stated that they would not be in support of the suggestions as they thought it was unnecessary and the costs would also be prohibitive, however they noted

**People and Communities Committee,  
Tuesday, 8th August, 2023**

that they were content for a report to be submitted to a future meeting and that the requests could be considered further at this stage.

**Lagan Valley Regional Support – Councillor Murray (Chairperson)**

The Chairperson advised that he had recently been contacted by representatives from Lagan Valley Regional Park, of which he was a Council appointed member of the Management Committee.

He advised that he had been informed that the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) which, along with Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, provided core funding for the park had recently written to the Directors advising that it was withdrawing its element of funding to the park with immediate effect and that it would not be funding any works done to date this year. He stated that, obviously, this was extremely concerning, and he sought permission for the Committee to write outlining its concern and support for the Park.

The Committee agreed to write the Department of Infrastructure stating its concern at the withdrawal of funding from the Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP), concern at the lack of notice given and outlining its support for LVRP.

Chairperson